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SUBJECT: RUSSIA AND A CFE "MORATORIUM"

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Classified By: Ambassador William J. Burns. Reasons 1.4 (B/D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Deputy Foreign Minister Kislyak reviewed with the Ambassador Putin's April 26 call for a moratorium on Russia's compliance with the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty and his insistence that all NATO Allies ratify the Adapted Treaty without linkage to the 1999 Istanbul commitments. For now Russia will comply with the terms of the treaty, including inspections and data exchanges. The GOR would look to upcoming meetings in Brussels for Allies to show flexibility in addressing long-standing Russian concerns and then make a permanent decision regarding a moratorium. Putin's gambit surprised the MOD and MFA bureaucracies, whose officials believe this position plays well domestically and will be difficult to walk back. Kislyak called for a "creative approach" on the Istanbul commitments, especially Moldova -- well aware that the Moldovans are offering to let the Russians stay in return for progress on the Transnistria conflict. One option of a creative approach could involve internationalization of the PKF under an OSCE umbrella. END SUMMARY.

MORATORIUM SOON BUT NOT QUITE YET

[1](#)2. (C) Putin's April 26 remarks to the Federal Assembly on a possible CFE moratorium touched off a round of mixed signals. The MFA told us that the moratorium would not go into effect until the issue had been discussed at the NATO-Russia Council (NRC). However, First Deputy Prime Minister Sergey Ivanov told the media May 3 that the moratorium was already in effect. General Buzhinskiy of the International Treaties Department in the Ministry of Defense (MOD) made similar remarks to visitors last week.

[1](#)3. (C) DFM Kislyak outlined to the Ambassador May 4 the GOR's likely next steps. Kislyak said Putin was serious about what he viewed as an outmoded treaty that imposed unilateral restrictions on Russia. Kislyak pointed to US agreements with Bulgaria and Romania on military facilities as an additional factor. He said Moscow would wait to see whether the US and Europeans take into account Russian concerns in the next month. Western reactions at the May 10 NATO-Russia Chiefs Of Defense meeting and the May 23 NRC meeting would be a factor in Russia's decision on whether to suspend compliance with the treaty. If Russian concerns were not taken seriously in the next month, Putin would issue a document that would require the GOR to suspend compliance; no formal presidential decree was required.

14. (C) The Ambassador urged the GOR to walk back the threat of withdrawal from the CFE, noting the importance of the treaty to European security and of Russia's Istanbul commitments. Kislyak reprised Russia's rejection of any linkage between the Istanbul commitments and NATO members' ratification of the Adapted CFE Treaty. Russia was moving ahead with its force withdrawals from Georgia (Russia accelerated its withdrawal in response to last September's tensions with Georgia over the arrest of four Russian military personnel). On withdrawal of troops and munitions from Moldova, Kislyak called for a more creative approach that distinguished between Russian peacekeepers in Transnistria and those forces guarding the Colbasna weapons depot. (As we and others have reported, the Moldovan draft for a package agreement between Moldova and Russia -- which Moldovan negotiators have been pressing vigorously -- explicitly calls for Russian troops to remain in Transnistria. Kislyak in essence viewed this as an argument to persuade us not to be more Moldovan than the Moldovans.)

MFA ON CFE

15. (C) Anton Mazur, the Foreign Ministry's chief CFE expert, amplified Kislyak's views to us May 8. Russia would continue to accept inspections and exchange data pending a final decision on whether to impose a moratorium. Ratification by all Allies including the Balts was Putin's bottom line. Otherwise, the Ministry's Legal Department had determined that the treaty's withdrawal provisions implicitly allowed

MOSCOW 00002201 002 OF 003

for "less significant" steps, including a moratorium or suspension. For the moment, Mazur said, Russia was considering only a moratorium. Putin's moratorium call was not linked directly to concerns about deployment of a US missile defense.

16. (C) Mazur reiterated that Russia had complied fully with the Istanbul Commitments. Troop withdrawal from Georgia is on track, with a full pull-out expected no later than the end of 2008. Russian peacekeepers would remain. (The CIS peacekeeping force itself has never been an Istanbul Commitment issue, but the PKF's continued use of the base at Gudauta -- to be closed under Istanbul -- is considered by Georgia to be a violation.) Moldova was a more complicated situation that would probably not be resolved until Transnistria's status was settled, Mazur continued. In the meantime, the treaty allowed for the stationing of six battalions in Moldova; at the moment, the Operational Group of Forces-Transnistria consisted of only two rotating battalions (peacekeepers) and one security battalion (guarding Soviet-era weapons facilities). In any case, Russia had little confidence that the Allies would move forward on ratifying the Adapted Treaty even if Moscow pulled all of its forces out of Moldova and Georgia tomorrow.

DOMESTIC POLITICS COULD BE COMPLICATING FACTOR

17. (C) Respected defense analyst Aleksandr Golts told us that Putin's statement on CFE was "absolutely political" and had nothing to do with real military issues. Golts' military contacts had been puzzled by the President's statement (MOD contacts told us the same). Independent defense analyst Pavel Felgengauer concurred that, in addition to concerns over U.S. Missile Defense deployments, domestic politics was a factor in the moratorium call. Felgengauer speculated that Putin had made it at the instigation of hard-liners in the Presidential Administration or First Deputy PM Sergey Ivanov. The MFA was not happy with Putin's remarks because it would now be hard for the GOR to reverse policy or to accept

anything less than full ratification of the Adapted Treaty by all Allies, which was unlikely.

TOWARDS A U.S. RESPONSE

¶8. (C) The GOR might have painted itself into a corner on CFE suspension, sparking a dispute that will excite European concern at a time when Russia has sought to create divisions in the Alliance. Our response needs to be one that will maintain NATO unity -- recognizing that:

-- some of our European diplomatic colleagues here, notably the Germans, have echoed de Hoop Scheffer's contention that there is no Alliance consensus on whether Russian peacekeepers in Transnistria are covered under the Istanbul Commitments; and

-- the Moldovan draft agreement on relations with Russia, with its provision for the Russians to remain, is close to being in the public domain.

Rather than allow Russia to probe for fissures in the Alliance, or for daylight between us and Moldova, we should use this opportunity to consider all options that will advance our objectives, recognizing that our course will not be easy and will require careful examination.

¶9. (C) Moldova: The U.S. has held some discussions in internationalizing the peacekeeping force in Transnistria. One option is to move forward on this, proposing to the Russians that we internationalize the peacekeeping force under an OSCE mandate -- since such forces are exempt from CFE limitations and therefore from the Istanbul Commitments. We should recognize that a significant Russian component will remain in the internationalized force -- a basic Transnistrian as well as Russian demand -- but giving it an OSCE umbrella would make the force transparent to the international community and could, with an appropriate OSCE mandate, provide the opportunity not only for troops from other countries, such as Ukraine, but also for military observers from a wide variety of countries, potentially including the U.S. Giving the internationalized OSCE force the mandate to monitor and guard the Colbasna facility would facilitate the removal of Russia's 14th Army troops, which

MOSCOW 00002201 003 OF 003

all Allies agree are covered under the Istanbul Agreements.

¶10. (C) Georgia: The overall poor tone of Russian-Georgian relations has made all dialogue problematic, but the issue of Gudauta is not insoluble. Our understanding is that the agreement between Georgia and Russia on closing Gudauta outlined which parts of the former base were permissible for PKF use. The extant Joint Fact-Finding Group, which investigated the March 11 Kodori incident, could be a vehicle for ensuring and certifying that PKF use of the base is within the guidelines set down in the Georgian-Russian agreement. Likewise, the Quadripartite Talks, which the Russians have recently pushed to resume in the village of Chuburkhinja with UNOMIG in the chair -- the other participants are the Georgians, Abkhaz, and PKF -- could also involve information exchanges which, under UN auspices, could serve to reassure Allies that the Russians are fulfilling their Istanbul commitments with regard to Gudauta.

¶11. (C) Putin's tough language on CFE was a typical enunciation of non-negotiable demands followed by a call for negotiations. The first part is a clear non-starter, since no NATO Ally will be ready to cave in to a Russian ultimatum. But by dismissing the rhetoric and turning to the call for negotiations, we can advance our own agendas -- in areas such as internationalizing the Transnistria PKF -- while providing the Russians with a face-saving way of climbing down at no cost to us.

